



CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN INDO-ARAB CULTURAL RELATIONS: A SURVEY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO OMAN

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India had never aspired to live in isolation and always kept its doors open for the people and culture from across the world. The philosophy of tolerance and coexistence of all faiths and races had been the essence of its civilization. It remained a melting pot for the world culture and civilization. The intensive interaction between India and Arab world was dynamic, diverse and multidimensional. However, the impact of this interaction was very much visible and lasting in the domain of culture and thought. The main aim of this paper is to focus on the cultural exchanges and the civilizational affinity that existed for several centuries. The cultural linkages in the past, in fact, have brought these two regions more close to each other and provided the base to maintain the relationship of similar sort in the contemporary times. In view of the enormity of the subject, I have divided my paper in two parts. First part is an overview of India Arab cultural relations that existed through out the ages. In the second part, I have tried to highlight the cultural affinity between India and Oman.

'Culture' and 'civilization' are the two coterminous terms, though each one possesses a distinctive semantic domain with clearly defined meanings. There is a burgeoning trend in the present religio-political context to use both synonymously. Most of the discussions then tend to confuse 'culture' with 'civilization' and civilization inevitably with 'religion'. These discussions then prepare ground for identifying the essence of culture in terms of 'civilizational clash'. Quite unfortunately these 'civilizational clash' theories never believe in an inter-civilizational dialogue and

exchange of cultural goods between two civilizations.¹ So there is a need for understanding culture and civilization that travel beyond the contemporary civilizational debate.

In its simple definition, civilization denotes to the ways of living, making nature bend to fulfill the needs of humankind. It includes also organizing societies into socially and politically well-defined groups working collectively for improved conditions of life in matters of food, dress and communication and so on. Anyway, civilization is a collection of 'lived practices' that enables a society to make sense of its existence.

Culture, on the other hand, refers to a set of values, customs, beliefs, practices which constitute the way of life of a specific group. An example would illustrate the things better: One who may be poor and wearing cheap apparel may be considered 'uncivilized' but still he or she may be the most cultured person. Culture concerns itself with individual habit, state of mind or the innermost conditioning of a person. Civilization's concern hinges around the state of intellectual and artistic resources of the whole society. This includes arts, science, music, dance and various higher pursuits of human life which are also classified as cultural activities.

India's Early Relations with Arabs

Indo-Arab relations that can be dated back to antiquity speak of such inter-cultural dialogues and exchanges between two age-old civilizations. There are a lot of historical evidences for this time-tested cultural tie up. As we find in religious sources, the first human being, Adam is believed to have landed in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and reached Arabia via India. Finally, he met Eve in Saudi Arabia.² Adam is believed to have landed in *dajna* (*that is Dakshin in Hindi*) which means south. Adam was landed in India from the heaven of sky. He set his first step in Srilanka, which was a part of the greater India. Several goods like perfumes and spices were on move to the Arab world from South India.³ The

¹. M.H.Ilias, Cultural Contours of India-West Asia Relations, in M.H.Ilias and P.J.Vincent, India-West Asia Relations: Understanding Cultural Interplays, (New Delhi, 2007), p 2

² Ekram, Shiekh Md., Aabe Kausar, Feroz Sons Ltd. Pakistan, 1968, p19

³ Nadwi, Sayyed Sulaiman, Arab-o-Hind ke Taluqat (Indo-Arab Relations), Darul Musannifin Azamgarh, U.P, p 1-2

Old Testament bears ample evidence for maritime mercantile relations between India and the Arab world during Solomon's period.

The Arabs had close commercial and cultural relations with the Indians in pre-Islamic period. Our friendship dates back to the very ancient times in history when Indian and Arab sailors plied their ships across the seas and established commercial links with each other. As a result, Arab traders built their permanent settlements on the western coast of India which played an important role in exchange of India- Arab cultural relations. From the time immemorial, these two civilizations have been in constant contact with the exchange of goods, ideas, cultures and people of each other. At this end of history, Indo-Arab relations have been on a distinctive trajectory with the massive movement of people from India to the Arab world and vice versa in the form of pilgrimage and labor migration.

Arabs' Indian connection predates the spread of Islam. Through the regular commercial trips, they knew about India long before the advent of Islam. There was frequent Arab seafaring on the western and southern coasts of India which culminated in Arab settlements in parts of India. The trading Arab groups established communities of especially on south-west coast. Indian goods were moved to Yemen and then to Syria, from there finally to the markets of Egypt and even Europe.

Parallel to this, Indian maritime traders made extensive voyages to the Arab world for the purpose of trade. These visits resulted in religious convergences of various sorts as there were many things in common between Hinduism and the pagan religions existed in West Asia. Sages from India mingled with the Arabs and started influencing each other's way of life. In so far as the Gulf coast was concerned a considerable number of Indians appear to have migrated there in Pre-Islamic era, either to establish businesses, seek employment with Arab traders or just to escape instability at home.⁴ The Indian groups which migrated and enjoyed greater position in the Arab world, to name a few were: *Zatt, Maids, Sayabjah, Asawera, Ahamera, Bayasera and Takakera*. Apart from

⁴. Ilias, M.H. & Vincent, P.J, Ed. India West Asia Relations: Understanding Cultural Interplays, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2007, P 114

experiencing the life of West Asia, these groups were also engaged in certain occupations.⁵

The Indus Valley Civilization was one of the world's first known civilizations with high amount of urbanization. This civilization flourished in the vast plains of the Indus River and adjacent regions which are now in Pakistan and western India. This civilization developed at approximately the same time as the early city states of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This urban civilization spread over a vast geographical region from the high mountains of Baluchistan and Afghanistan to the coastal regions of Makran, Sindh and Gujarat. There are material evidences for the existence of trade contact with the surrounding cultures in the Arabian Gulf, west and central Asia and peninsular India, during the peak of this civilization.

Arab historians of different periods held the view that Sind and Hind were two different countries. Sind was surrounded by the borders of Hindustan, Kirman and Sajistan while other parts bordering China was considered Hindustan. Hindustan was popularly known among the Arabs as Hind. These two regions are now called India and Pakistan respectively. From the ancient time both Makran and Sind had been regarded as a part of India. Arabic literature often conflates Sind with Hind though there were references in Arabic literature to treating Sind and Hind as separate geo-political entities.⁶

The regular commercial interactions between Arabs and Indians through out this period culminated in influencing each other's language and culture. Some Indian goods entered in the Arab world were named after the place of origin, al-Hind. Indian swords were very famous in Arab world and they called it Hindi, Hindawani and Muhannad. It gained the reputation of being very supple and sharp. Pre-Islamic Arab poetry has many references to this and many other Indian goods being popular among Bedouins. As it appears in the following stanza of great Arab poet Tarfa bin Abad. He says:

و ظلم ذوي القربى أشد مضاضة
على المرء من وقع الحسام المهند

⁵ Mubarakpuri, Qazi Athar, Arab-o-Hind Ahde Resalat Main, (Arab and India in the of the period of Prophecy), Maktabatul Haq, Jogeshwari, Mumbai, P. 59

⁶ Wink, Andre', Al Hind, The Making of Indo-Islamic World, Vol-1, Brill Academic Publishers, Boston, 2002, p144-145

Many Indian words like *sandal* (*Chandan*), *tanbul* (*pan*), *karanfal* (*peeper*), *Narjeel* (*coconut*) etc were very popular and widely used among Arabs. Although the Quranic scholars are of different opinion about the non- Arabic words used in the Holy Quran, the great Indian Islamic scholar Maulana Sayyed Sulaiman Nadwi, referring to Hafiz Ibn Hajar and Hafiz Seuti's works, asserts that "we can be proud of having few Indian words like misk (mushk), Zanjabeel (Jinjer) and Kafur (kapur) have been used in the holy Quran. ⁷

Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri quoting several Hadith (sayings of Prophet) sources says that Indian goods like Musk, camphor, ginger, carnation, pepper, wood, swords and clothes have extensively been used among the Arabs. Even Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) and his companions were very much fond of Indian goods. One can come across many references for the popularity of Indian goods in Hadith.⁸ Several Arab poets had used many Indian words in their poetry even before the advent of Islam. Pre-Islamic Arab poet Imraul Qais (497-545) says:

اذا قامتا تصوغ المسك منهما نسيم الصبا جاءت بر يا القرنفل

On the other hand, many Arab goods were used to be imported to India like palms and horses from Basra. King of Sri Lanka used to import alcohol from Iraq. Precious diamonds and fishes were used to be imported to India.⁹

The cultural contacts were not confined to the linguistic interactions only, but to a wide variety of activities ranging from menu to the naming of individuals and clans. Many distinguished families in Arab world carry the surname '*al-Hindi*'. Hind is still a popular name being used extensively by Arab women. The Arabs have contributed even to the naming of this region '*Hindustan*'. The name to the religion '*Hinduism*' is partly an Arab contribution. It was the Arabs, Persians or Greeks that we owe the concept of the Hindu – the people who live across the river Sindhu or Indus. There is no doubt that the people of India were referred to as Hindus by the Arabs long before the Hindu community began to identify themselves as Hindus.

⁷ Nadwi, Sayyed Sulaiman, Arab-o-Hind ke Taluqat (Indo-Arab Relations), Darul Musannifin Azamgarh, p 71-72

⁸ Mubarakpuri, Qazi Athar, Arab-o-Hind, Jamal Printing Press Delhi, 1982, p31

⁹ Mubarakpuri, Qazi Athar, Khilafat-e-Abbasia and Hindustan (Abbasid Caliphate and India), Jamal Printing Press, Urdu Bazar, Jama Masjid, Delhi, p356

India's Relations with Arab world after the Advent of Islam

The advent of Muslims in India is traced, generally, back to the Arab conquest of Sind, though long before that the Arabs already had settlements on the south-western coast of India. However, opinions vary on the advent of Islam in India and there is prominent version that there was Arab presence in Sind region before the Arab invasion of Sind. Although they were small in number, but their presence was significant. The Arab army headed by Muhammad bin Qasim invaded Sind in 710 A.D. This invasion led to a permanent occupation of Sind and southern Punjab but the rest of India was unaffected until the close of tenth century, when a fresh invasion began under Mahmud of Ghazna.¹⁰

The spread of Islam fostered this linkage tremendously. Islam reached in India mainly through the Arab traders who were active in maritime trade on the coastal towns of India. In the seventh and eighth centuries AD, with the advent of Islam and spectacular growth of trade, Arab Muslim merchants became very vital in the coastal trade of India and began to challenge the predominance of south Asian merchants.

The Indians who visited the Arab world during this period included many scholars, scientists and physicians who sojourned mainly in Baghdad which was a great centre of intellectual and cultural activity. The oral history revolving around the journey of Cherman Perumal, the last King of Chera dynasty to Mecca with the mission of meeting Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) is very popular in south India. The opinions differ on his meeting with the Prophet. Anyway, on his way back from Mecca, Cheraman Perumal died in Oman and his body was buried in a place called Salala.

The Muslim rule in northern India led to far-reaching effects in the field of culture and learning. Some Sindhi Muslim scholars were sent to Mecca in order to learn Islamic theology. In reciprocation, Arab Muslim scholars came to India with the purpose of learning mathematics, science, astronomy and philosophy. The Arabs brought in some technological innovations and introduced some new industries in Sind. New methods were applied by the Arabs in the field of agriculture. Gradually, Sindh acquired a great

¹⁰ Hitti, Philip K, History of the Arabs, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, p 210-212

prominence in Arab affairs for not only was it ruled militarily and administratively by the Arabs from their capital in al-Mansura but a large number of Arab merchants, travelers, missionaries and men of learning and erudition migrated to this province and made it their permanent home.¹¹

The origin of South India's cultural contacts with the Arab world pre-dates even the genesis and spread of Islam in this area. India was a fulcrum of world trade and a meeting point of western and eastern trade routes. And it is in the context of this great traffic of people and ideas that we find the first appearances of cultural contacts. Cultural interactions of course had made headway in this more liberal ambience of trade. The Arabs had settled down in many parts of south India as merchant communities, e.g. in Konkan (Maharashtra), Malabar (Kerala) and in many of the costal towns of Andhra Pradesh, Madras and Mysore.¹²

The long-distance trade in essentially high-value goods also spurred a number of factors that operated in the promoting cultures. Over the centuries, India had been the melting pot of many cultures. From Rome, China, Arabia etc, they made great voyage to India's southern and western coasts in search of spice. India had absorbed the best of all of these influences and remained as a perfect repository of all diverse cultures for long centuries. Indian maritime regions were more plural in their population in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture. The societies were all comprehensively connected to wide realms of trade, culture and politics. Give and take nature of the cultures was the norms of society. The religious orthodoxies prevalent inlands were brushed aside by this pluralism and there was openness to innovations and new ideas.

Scientific and Academic Interactions between India and Arab world

India's ties with the Arab world go back to 5000 years. Archaeological excavations across the region regularly yield evidence of the Arabs intimate maritime and commercial links with our civilizations in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. There is evidence of relations between the Harappan civilization and the Dilmun society. In pre-Islamic

¹¹. Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p 6

¹². Ibid, p 7

times, Arab traders acted as middlemen in trade between Bharuch in Gujarat and Puduchery and the Mediterranean through Alexandria.

India's relations with Arab world in southern India have been on different trajectory. In north, the Arabs came as conquerors and exercised their political might while in the south; they had an altogether different history of arrival. They came in south as travelers, merchants and occasionally as missionaries. India- Arab relations were not based on political antagonism but on friendship. This lively spread of Islam through the friendly merchants provided the opportunity for deep-rooted cultural exchanges and intellectual communication. It also led to the regular movement of scholars and cultural goods from each side.

Some scholars trace the beginning of studies on Hadith by Indians to the early days of the arrival of Islam in southern India in the 7th century and in north in the 8th century. Islamic scholars from the turn of the 8th Century AD to Al- Beruni (d.1048 AD) have, in their writings, documented Indo-Arab cultural links including Indian contributions to Arab thought and culture. Travelers between India and the Arab world were the vehicles not only for scholarly exchanges but also for cultural interactions at a popular level.

The direct and deeper cultural linkages and scientific exchanges between the Arabs and Indians trace its genesis to a century after the rise of Islam, specifically with the foundation of Abbasid Caliphate in the middle of 8th century. This period marked the beginning of a long history of cultural contact which lasted several centuries. The process of cultural exchange was reciprocal and there has been dissemination and diffusion of maximum amount of knowledge in the sciences, arts, religion, philosophy and social and cultural ideas and values. Translations of Indian works were undertaken by the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad where, especially under Harun al-Rashid, Indian concepts in secular subjects ranging from medicine to mathematics and astronomy were translated in to Arabic.

It is worth mentioning in this context that India, in ancient times, was far ahead of the world in science, philosophy and literature. Chess was invented in India. As a result of age old relations between India and Arab world, the Arabs have become acquainted with some facets of rich intellectual heritage of India. They had a very high opinion of

the Indians. After the rise of Islam when Arabs developed a keen sense of intellectual curiosity and a voracious appetite for learning, they were but naturally attracted to the intellectual legacy of India which served as a fount of knowledge to them, especially in the fields of astronomy, mathematics, medicine, philosophy and wisdom literature. 13

India can boast of a long history of over 5000 years since the time of Indus Valley culture. Over the centuries, it has gained such rich experience and developed such a massive fund of knowledge that when Al-Beruni came to India in 11th century, he listed quite a few branches of learning that impressed him most such as philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, logics, lexicography, drama, fiction, poetics, administration and matrimony. As early as 8th century, the Muslims got interested in all the learning of Hindus. The great Abbasid caliphs, Harun Al-Rashid and Mamun Al-Rashid, set up an Academy to know the heritage of past, particularly Greeks and the Indians. They invited the pundits from India, who liberally showered their learning in mathematics, medicine, astronomy and metaphysics. The Arabic numerals which the world knows today are in fact the products of Indian genius, who brought about a revolutionary change in mathematics through their discovery of zero and digits.14

India is a home of philosophy. Perhaps no country in the past might have reflected so deeply as India on such concepts of truth, beauty, love, justice, value, virtue, morals, manners and honour. Of the different systems of Indian philosophy, the Muslim world came to know of *yoga-sutra* of Patanjali, *Sankhya-sutra* of Kapila, the *Nyaya-bhasya* of Nyaya School, the *Mimamsa-sutra* of Jaimini of the Mimamsa School, the *Laukayata* of Charvaka School and the *Vedanta* school of Indian philosophy contained in Upanishads. 15

In fact, the Arabs had started translation of scientific ideas and knowledge into Arabic language after the rise of Islam, but it was confined only to Sharia sciences and books were written in Tafseer, Hadith, Fiqh and history. The only ruler, who paid some heed towards medicine and chemistry during this period was Khalid bin Yazeed bin Muawiya but with the establishment of Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, Indian and Persian

¹³. Vohra, NN, Ed. History, Culture and Society in India and West Asia, Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2003, p 221.

¹⁴. Abhyankar, Rajendra M, Ed. West Asia and the Region: Defining India's Role, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2008, p 225

¹⁵. Ibid, p 226

knowledge and scholarship got an importance. Abbasid Caliph Mansur (754-775) was very much interested in sciences. He received a delegation of mathematicians from Sind led by a Pundit that reached Baghdad with a Sanskrit book '*Surya Siddhanta*'. The Caliph himself monitored the translation of this work in to Arabic with the help of a mathematician of the court, Ibrahim Al-Fazari.

Caliph Mansur received an embassy from Sind which consisted of Indian Pundits who presented him several treaties on mathematics and astronomy. These works were later on translated in to Arabic with the help of pundits by the order of Caliph. Thus from about the middle of eighth century, an era of Indo-Arab scientific cooperation is said to have begun. The scientific literature of India that was introduced in Baghdad actually belonged to the Maurya and Gupta periods.¹⁶ India's scientific literature was first introduced to the Arabs in Baghdad where Sanskrit works were made available by the Indian delegation. Quoting famous Arab writer Al- Jahiz*, Sayyed Sulaiman Nadwi, points out that many Pundits and medical practitioners like Manka, Balha, Bazgar, Falbarfal and Sindbad were invited to Baghdad by Yahya bin Khalid al-Barmaki. ¹⁷

The Abbasids established the '*Baitul Hikmah*' in Baghdad, where scholars sat together and translated ideas and scientific knowledge from all across the world into Arabic. Many classic works of antiquity would have been forgotten if they were not been translated into Arabic. During this period the Muslim world was a cauldron of cultures which collected, synthesized and significantly advanced the knowledge gained from the ancient Mesopotamian, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, North African, Greek and Byzantine civilizations. In pursuance of his policy, Al-Mamun in 830 established in Baghdad his famous Baitul Hikmah (House of Wisdom), a combination of library, academy and translation bureau which in many respects proved the most important educational institution since the foundation of the Alexandrian Museum in the first half of the third century B.C.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p10

* Al- Jahiz (781-868) of Basra in Iraq was a famous Arabic prose writer and author of works on Arabic literature, biology, zoology and history.

¹⁷ Nadwi, Sayyed Sulaiman, Arab-o-Hind ke Taluqat (Indo-Arab Relations), Darul Musannifin Azamgarh, p 130-131

¹⁸ Hitti, Philip K, History of the Arabs, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, p 310

Closely parallel to this, the city of Mecca served as a Center of trade in Arabia. The tradition of the pilgrimage to Mecca became a site for exchanging ideas and goods. The influence held by Muslim merchants operated from Mecca over African-Arabian and Arabian-Asian trade routes was tremendous. Arab-Islamic civilization grew and expanded to then unknown maritime world alongside its merchant network.

Astronomy was one of the first sciences introduced in the Arab world at the end of 8th century through the Indian Sanskrit book *Surya Sidhhanta*. With the translation of this book, Arab scientists became acquainted with the developments taken place in India in the field of astronomy. After this, Indian astronomy was studied by the Arabs with greater effort and interest. The other Sanskrit astronomical works introduced in the Arab world at that time include: *Aryabhatiya* (Ar. Arjabhad or Arjabhar) by Aryabhat of Kusumpura (b. A.D 476); *Khandakhadyaka* (Ar. Al-Arkand) by Brahmagupta (b. A.D 598).¹⁹ The Arab traveler cum author Al- Bairuni has made some substantial reference on the enormous amount of popularity gained by astronomy among Indians.²⁰ Astronomy became popular in the Arab word when the second Abbasid Caliph, Mansur took over the throne. He was very much fond of astronomy so when he decided to built city of Baghdad, he made it according to astronomic rules.²¹

A number of Arab astronomers engaged themselves in the study of Indian works and translated with greater amount of improvisations on the basis of their own observations. Ibrahim bin Habib al Fazari who wrote *Kitab al Zij* based on *Surya Sidhhanta*, Mohammed bin Musa Al Khawarizmi and Habash bin Abdullah al Marwazi constituted a long array of astronomers who were really inspired by the Indian scholarships. The contribution of India in the growth of Arab astronomy was both conceptual and philological. Many Sanskrit astronomical terms were Arabicized and freely used by Arab astronomers in their treatises: kardaja (Karamajya, Sanskrit) was used and later replaced by Arabic Witr Mustawi then Jib (Jiva, Sanskrit), auj (Uch, Sanskrit) were used by earlier Arab astronomers.

¹⁹ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p11

²⁰ Ibid, p13

²¹ Nadwi, Sayyed Sulaiman, Arab-o-Hind ke Taluqat (Indo-Arab Relations), Darul Musannifin Azamgarh, p 153

Like astronomy, Indian mathematics was also introduced to the Arabs towards the end of 8th century. Ibrahim bin Habib al Fazari himself endeavored the translation of many Sanskrit mathematical treatises in to Arabic. Through these works, Indian numerical system and the concept of zero became known to the Arab world. The Arabs learnt mathematics from Indians and they called it Indian mathematics or numbers. It was via the Arabs, the Europeans learnt mathematical innovations originated in India and they called it Arabic figures. It is difficult to come to a conclusion when Arabs learnt it but it is said that the translation of *Surya Sidhanta* in Arabic that contained mathematics and numbers in its 13th and 24th chapters, introduced mathematics in the Arab world.²²

Indian system of medicine was known to the Arabs probably from the early times. The Quraysh tribe of Mecca handled the drug and spice trade and hence came in to frequent contact with India and Persia. The drug merchants had to supply not only directions for use but possibly medical, pharmacological, botanical and mineralogical explanations as well.²³ Translation of some medical books from Greek language to Arabic had already started in the Umayyad period in early 8th century but it developed fully with the establishment of Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Indian medical science (Ayurveda) was however properly introduced to the Arab world only after several of the classical Indian works on the subject were translated in to Arabic under the patronage of early Abbasid caliphs.²⁴

The introduction of Indian medicine in the Arab world is related to the illness of Caliph Harun Rashid (786-809). When he suffered from a serious disease, Arab physicians were unable to cure him. So, an Indian physician named Manka was called in by the Caliph at the suggestion of his courtiers. He treated the Caliph and cured him. He was rewarded and later attached to the hospital of Baramika. He was a very famous physician of that time, who had translated several medical works in to Arabic. Other Indian physicians who got a wide acclaim in the Arab world were *Ibn Dahn* probably a descendant of Dhanapati and *Salih* the son or descendant of Bhela. The famous Indian works translated in to Arabic were *Charaka Samhita*, *Susrud*, *Astanka Hridaya*, *Sindhvan (Siddhyoga)*, *Nidan* and *Kitab as -Summ*. Among these translated books, two require

²² Ibid, p 133-134

²³ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p16

²⁴ Ibid, p 16

special mentioning here; one is *Susrud* (Arabs called it Sasru) comprising on 10 chapters with the details of symptoms of illness and the medicine for its treatment; and the other is *Charaka Samhita* by famous Indian physician Charaka.

Charaka Samhita was first translated in to Persian and then Arabic by Abdullah bin Ali. The book *Nidan* explains only the signs of 404 illnesses, not the treatment.²⁵ Besides, several other works on different types of snakes and their poisons, drugs, treatment of pregnant women, intoxicants, disease and medicaments, effects of mania and hysteria were also rendered in to Arabic.²⁶ Quite interestingly, the works of an Indian woman physician, Rusa had been translated in Arabic that exclusively deals with women's diseases.

Literary and Cultural Interfaces

Music was the other major avenue, where quite lots of interactions were taken place. Jahiz, in his writings, has praised Indian music. It is said that no book related to Indian music have been translated into Arabic in Baghdad but the Spanish historian, Qazi Saa'ed Undulusi (1070) has mentioned about a book on Indian music. The book is "*Nafar*", which linguistically means "fruits of wisdom" has reached to Arabs. According to him this book contains Raag and Sur (music). By all possibilities, it may be the Persian book "*Nauber*" which means "new fruit" reached to the Arabs through the translation from Persian. Quoting one of his Hindu friends, Sulaiman Nadwi reiterates that it could be *Nadd* that means sound in Sanskrit.²⁷ Indian singers from Sind were very famous among the Arabs. Arab poets and educated persons were also entertained by them. The Arab poet Abu Jamil employed a famous singer Mutriz Sindi Madni for the recitation of his poems. He was a famous poet of Mahdi era (775-785). Khumar Qandaharya was a renowned Indian female singer whom Abdullah bin Rabi bought and brought in to Arabia for two dirham.²⁸

²⁵ Nadwi, Sayyed Sulaiman, Arab-o-Hind ke Taluqat (Indo-Arab Relations), Darul Musannifin Azamgarh, p 148

²⁶ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p17

²⁷ Nadwi, Sayyed Sulaiman, Arab-o-Hind ke Taluqat (Indo-Arab Relations), Darul Musannifin Azamgarh, p158

²⁸ Mubarakpuri, Qazi Athar, Khilafat-e-Abbasia and Hindustan (Abbasid Caliphate and India), Nadwattun Musannafeen, Urdu Bazar Jama Masjid Delhi, p390-391

As compared to the Indian scientific literature, literary works in Sanskrit were less known to the Arabs. There were hardly any Arabic translations of the classical works. What little was translated is well known and became popular literature in the medieval times. The reason may be that by the time, Arabs became aware of Indian literature, Arabic literature had sufficiently advanced in both forms of prose and poetry. So, was the case of classical Greek literature that also largely remained untranslated in to Arabic though the Arab literary critics studied the Greek theories and concepts of literary criticism especially the works of Aristotle.

Similarly the great Indian epics and philosophical works like *Upnishads* and *Ramayana* remained untranslated in Abbasid period probably on account of their religious content but they had been rendered in Arabic later on. The Indian literary work which gained a wide fame was Panchatantra- a collection of fables containing wise sayings. It was originally written in Sanskrit by a great Hindu scholar, Pandit Vishnu Sharma. However, it was lost and perished in the sands of time after being translated into Pahlavi (literary Persian) language in the 6th century. Thereafter, it was translated into Arabic in the 8th century by Abdallah bin al-Maqaffa and it was christened as "*Kalilah wa Dimnah*". The Arabic translation made it well known all over Europe and it was then translated into Hebrew, Latin, Spanish and Italian. During the reign of Nushirwan (531-79), Buzurjmihr was specially sent to India (Ganges) to procure a copy of the Fables of Bidpai (also known as Kalilah wa Dimnah).²⁹

Indian stories and tales were famous among the Arabs in Abbasid period. During this period, along with the translations of Indian books in sciences and mathematics, many stories were also rendered in to Arabic. Some of the famous books fall in this category are: *Kalila wa Dimna*, *Sindbad Kabir*, *Sindbad Sagheer*, *Kitabul Badd*, *Kitab Baunasef wa Balohar*, *Kitab Bonasef*, *Kitab Adabul Hind was Seen*, *Kissa Hubute Adam*, *Kitab Turuk*, *Kitab Dabak Hindi (on Man and women)*, *Kitab Suwerum*, *Kitab Shanaq fid Tadbeer*, *Kitab Baidba (on wisdom and knowledge)* and *Kitab Utur Mashrubat*.³⁰

Arab scholars, merchants and travelers had visited many parts of India but it seems they were either experts of Islamic science or were interested in religious

²⁹ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p18

³⁰ Mubarakpuri, Qazi Athar, Khilafat-e-Abbasia and Hindustan (Abbasid Caliphate and India), Nadwattun Musannafeen, Urdu Bazar Jama Masjid Delhi, p390

propaganda. But there is no evidence to show that Arab scientists of this period visited India.³¹ Al Beruni (973- 1048) although he was not an Arab, was one of the first Muslim scientists who visited India in the beginning of 11th century. In his well known book '*Kitab fi Tahqiq ma'il Hind*' (Researches on India), he didn't record the military and political history of India in any detail but wrote its cultural, scientific, social and religious history, thus showing that he had as wide a concept of history as that of modern historians.³² He had rendered a great service to India by presenting its ancient cultural and scientific legacy to the Arabic speaking world of his time.

It was Al-Biruni, who perhaps was the first scientist to translate Arabic scientific works into Sanskrit. Quoting from Sachu, Maqbool Ahmad says 'his work as a translator was a double one. He translated from Sanskrit into Arabic and from Arabic into Sanskrit. He wants to give Muslims an opportunity of studying the sciences of India and on the other hand, he feels called upon to spread Arabic learning among Hindus'.³³ He translated Samkhya by Kapila, the book of Patanjali, Paulassasiddhanta and Brahmasiddhanta by Brahmagupta and Brihatsamhita and Laghujatakam by Varahamihira into Arabic. He also translated into Sanskrit the following books: Euclid's Elements, Ptolemy's Almagest and a treatise of his own on the construction of astrolabe.³⁴

The establishment of Muslim kingdoms in the north and in the south and the introduction of Arab educational system and the Sharia brought a large number of Arab theologians, jurists and men of learning to India through out the medieval period and some Indian Muslim scholars also visited Arab world and acquired eminent positions in their respective fields. The history has witnessed the exchange of scholars between the two regions on a large scale. According to a Sikh religious tradition Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is said to have visited Arabia and Iraq. He met many religious scholars and gave lectures in many places.³⁵

³¹ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p28

³² Khan, M.S, Oriens, Vol.25 (1976), BRILL, P.86,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1580658?seq=1>

³³ Ahmad, Maqbul, Indo-Arab Relations, ICCR, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, P30

³⁴ Ibid, P 31

³⁵ Ibid, P 31

Some Arab travelers, such as Ibn Batuta of Morocco occasionally found themselves elevated to positions of power by their hosts; Ibn Batuta, for a while, was made the Qazi of Delhi, even though he was unfamiliar with the school of Islamic jurisprudence used in India. Indian scholars have also documented the compilation of a large number of Indian works in Quranic studies over the last 500 years as also in Islamic jurisprudence over a slightly longer period. Perhaps less remembered today is the contribution of Indians to Islamic scholarship in the medieval period.

After the Abbasid period, literary interactions declined. But the cultural renaissance known as An-Nahda in Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th century led to a renewed encouragement of translation of Arabic works into Indian languages and of Indian books into Arabic. Works by personalities such as Rabindranath Tagore and Allama Muhammad Iqbal were translated into Arabic by scholars from Egypt and other Arab countries.

Tagore's award winning famous book '*Geetanjali*' was translated by Wadie Haqqi in Lebanon. Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi's famous book on Indo Arab relations and Shibli Nomani's *Al Farooq* have been recently translated in Arabic by Dr. Suhaib Alam and Jalal Saeed Hafnavi respectively. Premchand's *Gaodan* had also been rendered into Arabic. Rampur Raza Library in Rampur has published a well researched book about India in Arabic. The book presents the picture of India as depicted in Arabic poetry. Egyptian scholar Tharwat Okasha prepared an encyclopedia of Indian arts in Arabic in recent times.

India's contribution in promotion of Arabic language and literature in India dose not need any introduction. The history of learning and teaching of Arabic language in India starts with the arrival of Islam. It came as the language of Arab traders who were in the region in visible numbers. It was further boosted by the invasion of Mohammed bin Qasim in 710 AD. Teaching of Arabic started traditionally in Mosques and Madrasas which were established to carter studies on Qur'an, Hadith and other aspects of Islamic studies. People learnt Arabic because it was the language of Quran and was necessary to understand the basic aspects of Islam. These Madrasas played an important role in promotion of Arabic language and produced famous scholars of Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh and Islamic history.

Teaching and learning of Arabic language and literature in India also played an important role for the promotion and development of Arab culture among Indians. A chain of madrasas have been established through out India to learn Arabic for religious purposes and later on, it became an integral part of Indian education system particularly for Muslims. These madrasas, through out the ages, had not only provided religious teachings to the Muslims but they had produced a large number of scholars in Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh and other branches of Islamic learning. These madrasas have also produced experts of Arabic language and literature.

Arabic language is not taught only in Indian madrasas. India attaches a great importance to Arabic because the language plays an important role in strengthening bilateral relations. For the purpose of maintaining its relations with Arab world, India had started imparting education of modern Arabic language and literature. Arabic language is being taught almost in most of the Indian universities and colleges through out the country. These universities and colleges are playing an important role in strengthening the cultural bonds of age old relations in the contemporary times.

Arabic language, literature and Islamic studies flourished in Indian sub-continent subsequently through out the period. India had produced and still producing well known scholars of Islamic studies and experts of Qur'an and Hadith. It had contributed a lot in preserving and promoting Islamic culture and civilization in the region. It has not only produced eminent scholars in different fields of Arab history and Islamic studies but also in Arabic language and literature who had immensely enriched the Arabic literature in both forms of prose and poetry.

There is a long list of Indian scholars who had made a huge contribution in preserving and promoting the Islamic scholarship including Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence and the Arabic language and literature. It is not possible to mention here all the names but a few are as follow: Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Mohammed Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Shah Waliullah of Delhi, Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, Maulana Azad Bilgrami, Siddique Hasan Khan, Allama Abul Hai Al-Hasani and Mualana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and many others. Arabic language and Islamic studies have impacted a lot on India culture and particularly on Muslim society that is not possible to discuss here.

In the recent times, cultural and literary encounters between India and Arab world are on a large scale, particularly after the establishment of India Arab Cultural Centre at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. This Centre is regularly engaged in fostering the age-old cultural relations by organizing Arab cultural programmes in India as well as promoting Indian culture in Arab world. Literary encounters between the well known Indian and Arab writers are taking place on regular basis. The Centre, during the last two years has successfully translated and published more than 20 books of well known Indian authors including A. P. J Abdul Kalam (former President of India), Amartya Sen and Prof. Mushirul Hasan into Arabic. Likewise, a number of Arab literature have been translated several Indian languages. The process of literary and cultural exchanges between India and Arab world is on large scale under the ambiance of this Centre.

Most recently a fabulous work on Indo-Arab civilizations is coming out by renowned Indian artist M. F. Husain. Currently, he is working on two large projects, the history of Indian civilization and the history of Arab civilization. The latter was commissioned by Qatar's powerful first lady, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned wife of Emirates' ruler Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. The works of painting will be housed in a separate museum in Doha.

India's Cultural Relations with Oman

In the second part of my paper, I have tried to find out the cultural affinity and educational links between India and Oman which existed for centuries. In fact, this cultural affinity has brought the two countries more close to each other in terms of economic and political relations and the presence of a thriving Indian expatriate community in Oman. During the course of my presentation, I will not touch India's political and trade relations with Oman because dealing with India's over all relations with Oman is a huge task and it is out of my paper's preview. I will focus only on the cultural aspect that forms to be the solid base of strong bilateral commercial and economic relations.

It is well known that India and Oman are linked by geography, history and culture. There is evidence of people-to-people contacts dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization and, in later times, the links continued to exist with the Gujarat and Malabar

coasts. It is known by several archeological findings that human interaction between two countries goes back to more than 4500 years ago. The ancient aircrafts that were found in Oman indicate that it had links with Indus Valley Civilization.³⁶

Omanis first came into contact with Indians under the Sumerian and Harappan civilizations. Oman because of its vast copper deposits caught the attention of early traders in the Indus valley, who traded in copper and other materials. Although little is known about the early settlement of Indians in Oman, significant contacts were established as far back as 600 A.D.³⁷ As I have earlier stated that several Indian groups had migrated to Arab world including Oman even before the advent of Islam.

The relations between these two countries go back to thousand of years that are greatly facilitated by geographical proximity and cultural affinity. Both countries enjoy warm and cordial relations which can be ascribed to historical maritime trade linkages, friendship between Oman's royal family and India and finally the important role played by the expatriate Indian community in Oman. The treaty of friendship, commerce and navigation and other important agreements signed subsequently has strengthened the bilateral relations between the two countries.

This relationship is further strengthened through bilateral visits. The historical presence of traders and Indian expatriate community has provided a solid base for close relations between the two countries in recent times. Historians have recorded that Indians were undertaking commercial activities in Muscat from the 15th Century. In the early days, the Indian community consisted of traders and financiers from Gujarat (Kutch) and Sindh, including the Khojas (Lawatis) and the Hindu business community (Banias), who form the Hindu Mahajan Association in Oman. ³⁸

During 18th century, India and Oman enjoyed close relationship in the fields of trade, diplomacy and politics as Tipu Sultan and Sayyed Sultan bin Ahmad, the Sultan of Oman have appointed their representatives in Mangalore and Muscat to look after each one's interest. Tipu Sultan, the mighty and memorable ruler of southern Indian state of Mysore, had taken many bold and imaginative steps to cultivate and maintain (despite

³⁶. Rahman, Anisur, International Politics, Vol.2, No.III, Winter & Spring 2009, (Biannual Journal), Tehran, Iran, p 99

³⁷. India and Oman: History, State, Economy and Foreign Policy, Ed. Pasha, A.K, Gayan Sagar Publications, Delhi-1999, p 73

³⁸. http://www.indemb-oman.org/India_Oman_relations.asp

many odds) friendly relationship with the gulf region particularly Oman.³⁹ Both the rulers have given much concession to each other to promote their interests. Many went to Oman with their families and established homes there. As a result of which several leading Hindu merchants emerged as key players in Omani political life over the years.⁴⁰

The relations between India and Oman started strengthening on the basis of mutual cooperation and self interest. Many Indian merchants have settled in Oman during the British rule. Under the British rule in India, Indo-Omani relations have entered into a new phase. In 1875, Britain proclaimed a law that “anyone who had settled in Muscat after the British assumed direct control over his native territory in India could obtain British protection”.⁴¹

India-Oman Contemporary Relations

The relations between the two countries got revitalized especially after India got independence in 1947. The Consulate of India was opened in Muscat in February 1955. Till 1971, the UK and India were the only two countries with a diplomatic presence in Oman. The first Ambassador of India took up his assignment in Muscat in 1973. Oman established its Embassy in New Delhi in 1972 and a Consulate General in Mumbai in 1976. 50 years of Indo-Oman diplomatic ties were celebrated from January 2005 to February 2006 with a number of unique events and functions to emphasize the historic and varied nature of the bilateral relations.⁴²

In recent years, India-Oman relations have been marked by regular high-level visits, which have helped to foster close understanding and a shared vision to develop a partnership in the areas of politics, economics and culture. The contribution of the Indian community, working side by side with the people of Oman, in the development of the country and promoting cultural, education and bilateral economic relations has been the other pillar in this partnership.⁴³ In 2007, when the Indian government conferred the

³⁹. Pasha, A.K, Ed, India and Oman: History, State, Economy and Foreign Policy, Gayan Sagar Publications, Delhi-1999, p 74

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid, 75

⁴². http://www.indemb-oman.org/India_Oman_relations.asp

⁴³.Ibid

‘Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding’ on His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos bin Said; it opened a new chapter in India-Oman relations.

There are around 550,000 Indians in Oman, constituting the largest expatriate community in the country. They include skilled workers and technicians and professionals such as doctors, engineers, bankers, finance experts, managers, etc. with many holding middle and senior management positions in the corporate sector. Several Indians also hold responsible positions in Omani government departments and public undertakings. 44

The contribution of People of Indian Origin (PIOs) to the development of Oman, particularly in the fields of commerce, healthcare, education, horticulture, finance, construction and communication etc. is widely acknowledged. As a result, a number of Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) have been granted Omani nationality. Some of them have also received high awards from Omani and Indian governments.⁴⁵ Mr. Kanaksi Khimji and Mr. P Mohammed Ali, both the prominent member of Indian community in Oman, received the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Puruskar in January 2003 and January 2004 respectively. 46

Bilateral Cultural Relations

The Indian expatriate community in Oman has immensely impacted on the life and culture of Omanis. Their influence is obvious in all spheres of life including official events. It is amazing to note that at the banquet reception which Sultan Qaboos bin Said hosted in honour of visiting Indian president, the band played was popular Hindi song from the film, Sholay ‘*Yeh dosti hum nahin chodenge*’. 47 This symbolizes the deepness of bilateral cultural relations that both the countries are enjoying.

The Indians have also contributed to the development of particular dialect of Arabic which is being used in Oman and you can find an enormous amount of words of Indian origin in their vocabulary. To name few: Aspataal (Hospital, المستشفى), Qooli

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ . Rahman, Anisur, International Politics, Vol.2, No.III, Winter & Spring 2009, (Biannual Journal), Tehran, Iran, p 102

⁴⁶ . Oman in Focus, 2008 Edition, Embassy of Sultanate of Oman, New Delhi, p20

⁴⁷ . India and Oman: History, State, Economy and Foreign Policy, Ed. Pasha, A.K, Gayan Sagar Publications, Delhi-1999, p 86

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(الحمال), Santary (Military العسكري), Pankha (Fan, المروحة), Tawa (آنية عمل الخبز), Baalty (Bucket, السطل), Saa-maan (assests, الاثاث), Tijouri (Box, الصندوق), Chash-ma (Spectacle, النظارة), Chul-ha (Furnace, الطباخة الصغيرة). Omanis also use several Hindi expressions in their daily life like: *Chup* (Be Silent), *Shaa-baash* (well done) and *Bakh-shish* (Tips). According to Dr. Saeed Suliamn Al-Issaei*, these words of Hindi origin are not only find expression in spoken language but also constitute a considerable part of Omani literature. The following stanza from an Omani poem illustrates it clearly. 48

دار قلبي دورة البنكه خشم ريم لا يزاعر به

Indian dishes are very popular in Oman and many food items are also consumed in Oman without changing their Indian names like Biryani (البرياني), Pakora (بكورا), Samosa (سمبوسا), Dal (دال) and Keema (كيما). Sita-Phal is a common Indian fruit which did not lose its Indian name while traveled to Oman; it is called (الاستفعل) in Oman. 49

Indian Cinema and music are very popular among the Omanis and they play an important role in augmenting bilateral cultural relations of both the countries. To promote the cultural relations, many agreements and Memorandum of Understandings have been signed between the two countries.

People of Gulf region particularly Omanis are fond of Indian movies. Indian cinema entered in Oman in seventies and subsequently Omani televisions channels started broadcasting Indian movies on every Friday. Indian movies contributed a lot in introducing Indian cultural in Oman. The reason of the popularity of Indian cinema is that they deal the subjects like forgiveness, coexistence, religious tolerance, freedom of speech, respect to each other and inter-faith dialogues. Indian movies are regularly shown on Omani televisions. Many Indian films including Feroz Nadiawala's films 'Aawara Paagal Deewana' and 'Aan-Men At Work' have been filmed in Oman in 2002 and 2003 respectively. Most Indian newspapers and magazines are available in Oman. Several TV channels can be accessed using free to air and paid satellite subscription services available in Oman.

The cultural resemblance of Indians and Omanis are very much noticeable in clothing, jewels, name of places and marriages. Indian clothing particularly Sarees and

⁴⁸. This is an unpublished paper presented in an International Seminar on "Literary and Cultural Heritage of India and Oman held in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India in November, 2010

⁴⁹. Ibid

Kashmiri and Begali dresses are very popular among women in Oman. It was observed that the Omani turban (The Masar) was for a long time exclusively made and exported from Kashmir. A large number of Indians in Kerala used to wear the same Masar as the Omanis have on their heads. It is said that there is an area called Salalah in Hyderabad in India named after the city of Salalah in Oman. There is a considerable degree of similarity between the embroidery on garments and wooden crafts in Rajasthan and Oman. The tradition of marriage between Indians and Omani are very old. It started with the arrival of Omani traders in India. Arrival of Islam in India and permanent settlements of Arabs also compelled to marry each other.⁵⁰

The Office of the Cultural Attaché in New Delhi and Indian Social Club, a representative of Indians in Oman are playing a crucial role in promoting and strengthening cultural bonds between the two countries. Bilateral visits of cultural and educational delegations have made the relations stronger. The Omanis in India particularly the students are the best ambassadors of their homeland as they exhibit their culture on different occasions. The Omani cultural troupes often gave enthralling performances in different parts of India. Recently an Omani cultural troupe performed in front of the students and teachers of Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. The programme was organized by India Arab Cultural Centre of the university.

Omani artists displayed their paintings at “Between the Seas” a first of its kind art exhibition in India in 2008. Oman brought in to limelight by its artists in New Delhi’s India Habitat Centre where they exhibited their paintings. Displaying the works of Anwar Sonya, Radhika Hamlai, Hassan Meer and Antje Manser, the art exhibition was described as full of vibrant colors. Omani paintings and architectural designs attracted close to one hundred visitors every day.⁵¹

Many Indian artists staged their performances in Oman during the past few years. These artists are generally from Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam film industry. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) also regularly sponsors the visit of artists to Arab countries including Oman to make the cultural bonds stronger. ICCR’s Arabic quarterly journal ‘*Thaqafatul Hind*’ provides the best opportunity for Arabs to be acquainted with

⁵⁰. This is an unpublished paper presented in an International Seminar on “Literary and Cultural Heritage of India and Oman” held in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India in November, 2010

⁵¹. Oman in Focus, 2008 Edition, Embassy of Sultanate of Oman, New Delhi, p24-25

the Indian culture. It is a very popular journal not for Omanis only but for the entire Arab world.

Indian Social Club plays an important role in the social and cultural life of Indians living in Oman. Cultural and sports activities are organized by this club. It also hosts visiting artists and is involved in philanthropic work.⁵² Indian educational institutions have played and still playing an important role for the promotion of cultural relations between the two countries. Some of the prestigious institutions in India have catered education to the top Omani leaders like Taimur bin Faisal who stayed almost 30 years in India and Sultan Said bin Taimur, the father of Sultan Qaboos.

It is said that there is a 'House of Oman' in Ajmer district of Rajasthan where the members of the ruling family of Oman used to stay during their study in famous Mayo College. Many famous Omani personalities like the poet, Abdullah bin Mohammad At-Taaei, Mohammed Amin Abdullah and Jawad bin Jaafar al-Khaboori, the author of the famous book 'Oman's role in Indian subcontinent' have visited and studied in India. The great Omani poet, Abu As-Sufi stayed some time in India with Taimur bin Faisal and learned English and Urdu languages.⁵³

It was found that many Omanis have studied in India and they still keep coming in large number to Indian universities and institutions of higher learning especially in technical subjects like engineering, information technology and medicine. Currently, a large number of Omani students are studying in different colleges and universities of South India. According to the Omani Cultural Attaché in New Delhi around 1,000 Omani students have been graduated from different colleges of India and more than 1,500 students are studying⁵⁴. Most of the Omani students prefer to study in colleges situated in southern Indian cities like Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai and a few study in northern cities like Delhi. The reason may be the moderate climate that attracts Omani students to the southern part of India.

⁵². Rahman, Anisur, International Politics, Vol.2, No. III, Winter & Spring 2009, (Biannual Journal), Tehran, Iran, p 106

⁵³. This is an unpublished paper presented in an International Seminar on "Literary and Cultural Heritage of India and Oman held in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India in November, 2010

⁵⁴. <http://www.omancdin.com/stu-sta.htm>

Several Indian educational institutions including Birla Institute of Technology and Manipal University have opened their centers in Oman to cater education to Omanis.⁵⁵ Apart from that a chain of Indian schools are playing an important role in promotion of Indian culture in Oman. The presence of 16 Indian schools in different parts of Oman indicates that the Indian community attaches a great deal of importance to education and cultural affinity. All schools follow CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) pattern, except one, which is affiliated to the KSB (Kerala State Board as well as CBSE)⁵⁶.

Religious freedom in Oman is one of the major factors of long-lasting India – Oman relations. Basic law of the country guarantees freedom of religious practice. Muscat has two temples where congregations are regularly held and pujas are performed daily. One temple called Shiva Temple that is located in Muscat and estimated to be over 100 years old. Another one is devoted to lord Krishna that is situated in Ruwi. There are some Gurdwaras with in the precincts of labor camps. For the Christians, there are seven churches to offer prayer. Indian festivals like Deepawali, Shivratri, Janamashtami and Nav Ratri are being celebrated with all freedom in Oman. ⁵⁷

Conclusion

Indo-Arab cultural relations have been persisted through out the historical period without any visible breaks or gaps. The rise and expansion of Islam must perhaps be the most decisive of those factors that fostered Indo-Arab relations in a big way. There is, of course, a cultural element in it. Among the several elements of growth brought out by the expansion of Islam was a cultural dynamism which spread through the lands where Muslims travelled like wildfire. With the newfound faith, for several centuries, the Arabs had showed an unusual energy in spreading their culture.

Maintaining strong trade relations with the Arab world, India remained pivotal in the exchange of literature between these two regions. In reciprocation to the flow of cultural commodities, ideas and knowledge traveled to the Arab world from India in the form of books in science and mathematics. There were deep underlying cultural and

⁵⁵. Oman in Focus, 3rd Edition, Embassy of Sultanate of Oman, New Delhi, May, 2005

⁵⁶. http://www.indemb-oman.org/India_Oman_relations.asp

⁵⁷. Rahman, Anisur, International Politics, Vol.2, No.III, Winter & Spring 2009, (Biannual Journal), Tehran, Iran, p 108

material commonalities across these two civilizations. Cultures that often seem so widely divergent were in fact in constant contact and exchange with each other. The period also witnessed the mutual migration of substantial merchant communities from both the places. This legacy is now being maintained intact with a huge presence of Indian expatriates in several Arab countries including Oman.